

Of Shadows and Scars

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Summary: Set during the Second Film, and in a world where Gale is a Victor. Venus Lockdust is seventeen years old and so close to escaping the Games once and for all. She's not talented or skilled in anyway besides her compassionate nature. Having spent the past few months tending to a brokenhearted Gale, Venus' world is about to be throw upside down when Snow changes the Games forever.

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**\*\*Chapter One\*\***

A loud and soul twisting scream woke me from my sleep. Instantly getting up, I raced out of my bedroom and rushed down the corridor searching for the source of the scream. This had been happening ever since Katniss and Peeta returned from the 74th Hunger Games. He would cry out in fear, in pain and in horror every night. He'd lash out and scream until the sun came up. A few months ago he'd been fine. He'd managed to conquer his fear of the games and have pride in the fact he survived it all those years ago. But when Katniss left him for Peeta, all those walls he'd put up to keep the fear at bay fell down. He resorted to the terrified mess he'd been when he returned from the Games four years ago. He left his family home and retreated to the house he'd been rewarded with on Victory Road. He shut everyone out of his life and became a recluse. Being one of his closest friends, I took it upon myself to take care of him.

At first he wouldn't let me in, so I'd leave food and water on his doorstep and then go home. After a while he started coming outside to talk to me on the doorstep, then he'd left me in for something to drink. It took a few weeks, but he finally letting me take care of him properly. He invited me to come and live with him, which at first I'd been hesitant about, but when I realised how poorly he was taking care of himself, I knew I had no choice. I accepted his offer and had moved in the very next day.

The first few days were tough. The house was an absolute mess and probably wasn't helping his health, then there was the matter of his diet. He was only eating bread and barely any meat. There were no vitamins of any kind going into his body which made him weak and often quite nauseated. Eventually I managed to ease him back into a healthier diet and life style. We'd go out hunting together so he could get some fresh air, then I'd cook all the meals while he cleaned up the house. He was starting to look a lot healthier, and seemed a lot happier. But there was nothing I could do to make the night any easier. He was still haunted by nightmares of the Games, there was no way I could stop that from happening. So when I finally reached his room and saw him writhing about on his bed, screaming in fear, I was instantly by his side. There was a technique I'd developed over the past week, an easy way to calm him down without getting hurt myself. The first time I'd tried to wake him up from his nightmare, he'd unintentionally punched me in the eye. He'd apologised countless times, all of which I'd accepted. It was an accident, it wasn't like he'd intentionally gone out of his way to hit me. But I was a lot more careful from that moment on. First I'd sit on the bed without touching him, making hushing sounds to let him know I was there. I'd then gently hold his hand and then hold him close once he stopped lashing about. It normally took a few minutes at the most for him to calm down, however tonight was different. No matter how gentle I was and no matter how many times I tried soothing him he still would lash out and scream. If I didn't restrain him, he was going to hurt himself, so I quickly climbed on top of him and held his wrists down, begging and pleading with him to calm down. As it turns out, that was a big mistake on my part. Even though he was asleep he somehow managed to kick me in the stomach, sending me flying off the bed and crashing into the wall. The loud thump of my back smashing against the wall could have been heard miles away, so could my cry of pain when I hit the floor. Moments later, Gale stopped screaming and started panting.

"V-Venus?" His voice called from the darkness. I remained silent. If I spoke now my voice would give away the fact I was in pain and he'd never forgive himself. Maybe if I stayed quiet he'd think it was just a dream and go back to sleep, then I could quietly leave. However, my plan wouldn't come to be. Gale slowly stood up and switched on the lights, his eyes going wide when he saw me laying on the floor. Things only got ten times worse when Haymitch, Katniss and Peeta barged into the room, probably having heard me scream.

"What happened?" Katniss demanded, switching her gaze between Gale and I constantly.

"I-I hurt her. V-Venus I'm so sorry." Gale stuttered, backing himself up into a corner.

"Gale it's fine. Honestly, I barely felt a thing." I lied, slowly hauling myself to my feet. Resisting the urge to scream as a surge of pain shot down my spine was almost impossible.

"No, it's not fine. You need to get out of here before I hurt you again. Go. Now." Gale ordered, looking directly into my eyes. I could see the hurt and the pain filling them. I couldn't leave him, not now.

"No, Gale, I'm staying here. I'm going to help you." I stated, slowly

walking over to him.

"GET OUT!" He yelled, causing me to stop dead in my tracks. He'd never yelled at me before, he'd never raised his voice or shouted at me. I didn't fight back when Katniss gently guided me out of the room, through the corridors and out of the house, towards the house where Haymitch lived.

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The next morning I found myself sitting in front of the large screen in Haymitch's house, waiting for President Snow to announce how the third Quarter Quell would be celebrated for this year's Hunger Games. Haymitch sat beside me, a large bottle in his hand. Probably something filled with alcohol.

"You're seventeen aren't you? Just one more year to go and you're free." Haymitch pointed out. He was right. If I survived this reaping and the next one, I'd never have to worry about being selected as tribute ever again. I'd be able to live my life without worrying about being killed in an arena for sport.

"On the seventy-fifth anniversary, as a reminder to the rebels that not even the strongest among them can overcome the power of the Capitol, the two traditional tributes from each district will be joined by an additional two tributes that will be reaped from the existing pool of victors." Snow announced, causing my heart to sink at that very moment. Gale. Peeta. Katniss. Haymitch. There would now be four tributes for each district, two Victors and two from the members of district twelve. Katniss was the only female Victor. She was going back into the Hunger Games, no matter what anyone did. Then Gale had a one in three chance of being picked. Oh god. No. This couldn't be happening. My thoughts were interrupted when Haymitch threw his bottle at the screen, causing glass to smash in every direction. The sound of a door slamming caught my attention. I ran out of Haymitch's house as fast as I could to see Katniss running out of her house, shortly followed by Peeta. Gale had just stumbled out of his house and was making his way towards the forest. I ran after him as quickly as I could, yelling his name to try and grab his attention.

Within a few minutes he'd wandered deep into the forest and I'd only just managed to catch up with him. Finally he came to a stop and fell to his knees, tears pouring down his face. I was instantly by his side and holding him close. I had no idea what to say to him. He'd survived the Hunger Games when he was fourteen years old, and no one who won at that age would ever want to go back.

"Shh, Gale listen to me, it's going to be ok." I whispered, though I couldn't promise him that. All I could do was be there for him until the Reaping, which was tomorrow. After a moment, he nodded and wrapped his arms around me, hugging me tightly. His tears were falling down onto my top but I didn't care. All I cared about in that moment was making sure Gale didn't break down. It didn't take me long to convince him to go back home into the warmth, where he wrapped himself up in a blanket on the sofa. He didn't say a single word for the rest of the day, but surprisingly he didn't have a single nightmare.

On the morning of the reaping, I put on my best dress like I did each

year. I hated it, but those were the rules. Waiting for Gale to get dressed into the clothes the Peacekeepers provided him with, I took a moment to let out a shaky breath. While I knew I'd done well this year in keeping my chances low, there was still a nagging thought in the back of my head saying 'You could be like Primrose Everdeen. She barely did anything, yet on her first year she was picked. That could be you'. I did my best to ignore it, but a part of me couldn't help but believe it. No matter how good your chances were at not being reaped, fate could just ruin your life in the blink of an eye. It was all a matter of luck.

Moments later Gale walked down the stairs and stood by my side. He looked incredibly pale, but he managed to hide his fear very well. If you didn't know him as well as I did, you wouldn't notice it. But when Gale was afraid, he'd hold his thumb between his forefinger and his middle finger, squeezing it ever so slightly. We were then escorted by two Peacekeepers to where everyone else had been rounded up. I joined the crowd while Gale was escorted to the stage with the other Victors. Instead of the two bowls that normally stood on the stage, there were now four. I noticed the one on the far right only had one bit of paper in it. That had to be the bowl for the female Victors, seeing as Katniss was the only one.

"Welcome, welcome welcome, to the 75th Hunger Games. We'll be starting with the Victors today, and as always, ladies first." The woman who always did the reaping for District Twelve announced. After pulling the single piece of paper out of the bowl, she unfolded it and declared the female victor tribute for district twelve would be Katniss Everdeen. She then turned to the male Victors, where I couldn't help but smile slightly at Gale, trying to be as supportive as I could. He smiled back slightly, still holding his thumb between his fingers. After a slight pause, the woman announced Haymitch would be the Victor tribute for District Twelve, however Peeta stepped in and volunteered himself as tribute. The horror in Katniss' face was all to clear. The woman conformed herself, then moved back to the traditional female tribute bowl.

"And the female tribute from District twelve this year is...Venus Lockdust." My heart stopped beating and my whole body froze. My name. They'd called out my name. This couldn't be happening. No. Please no. As the Peacekeepers guided me to the stage, all I could hear was my heart beating, and Gale shouting "No".

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